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ADDRESS

TO THE

LANDOWNERS OF ENGLAND,

ON THE

CORN LAWS.

BY

VISCOUNT MILTON.

*Charles William Ward & Co. 17, Abchurch Lane,
5th Earl Fitzwilliam*

~~SECOND EDITION.~~

LONDON:

JAMES RIDGWAY, PICCADILLY.

M.DCCC.XXXII.

38. 327487

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1832

The following pages were written many months ago, when I was not a Member of the House of Commons. The paramount interest excited by another subject caused their publication to be delayed, but scarcely any alteration has been made in them, except where the difference of date makes a variation in the expression necessary.

Wentworth, September, 1832.

TO THE

LANDOWNERS OF ENGLAND.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN,

IT is my desire to invite your attention to a question, the importance of which is acknowledged by all, though few, perhaps, estimate it as highly as I do.

I address myself to you, because it is through, and by you, that the alterations which appear to me essential to the welfare of the country, must be effected. Any material change in a system of laws, deemed by a considerable branch of the community conducive to its prosperity and security, ought rather to be carried into effect by the consent of that branch, than

in the form of a triumph over it; and notwithstanding the interval, which seems to separate the opinions of men, concerning the Corn Trade, we need not despair of this result. That it must be attained, however, through appeals, (perhaps frequently made) to the good sense, and, I may add, to the good feelings of men, rather than by any overt attack upon opinions which others may consider as prejudices; but which they themselves regard as well founded, I am thoroughly persuaded. I am most anxious, therefore, that you should consider, whether you have seriously and comprehensively examined the validity of these opinions, and whether the arguments, by which they are defended, are sound or unsound. These are questions of the utmost importance to our arriving at a legitimate conclusion.

Suppose it were broadly and nakedly asserted, by some speculative writer on politics, that it was beneficial to a nation, or, in other words, to the individuals who compose the nation, to pay a high price for its subsistence; would not such an assertion excite the surprise

of his readers, and would they not expect that a proposition, so repugnant to the general feelings of mankind, so (apparently, at least) inconsistent with common sense, and so adverse to the spirit of every humane and enlightened legislature, was to be upheld, not merely by authority, but by plain and unanswerable reasoning? They would expect him to demonstrate, not that a high price of subsistence was beneficial to any particular class, and that, through that class, the rest of the community would be indirectly benefited, but that the nation at large was so immediately interested in maintaining it, that his proposition (paradoxical as it might appear at first sight,) would be proved, by investigation, to be an undeniable truth. Such, however, is the proposition which affirms the wisdom of the Corn Laws. The first object of these laws is to raise the price of corn above its natural level; their next, and ultimate object, is to raise the value of land. The employment of the agricultural population is stated by some to be another object in view; but this is evidently a collateral and incidental

one, as the arguments used in their favour bear only upon the others.

The supporters of them say, that it is wise so to raise the price of corn, and the value of land; and, moreover, that it is just. These are the points, which it seems to me, that you have not investigated with that impartiality which becomes your station in the community. The Corn Law is said to be just, because the landowner is liable to charges, from which other classes of the people are exempt. He alone is liable, it is said, to highway rates; to county rates, to poor rates; in short, to all local taxation, and, *therefore*, it is just that artificial means should be taken, in order to raise the value of his property. In this, as in every other argument, the truth of the premises must be ascertained, before we admit the soundness of the conclusion. In the first place, then, is it true, that the landowner alone is liable to all this local taxation? That, in a great degree, it falls ultimately upon the *real property* of the country, no doubt can be entertained; but there is a material difference between its falling

upon real property, and its falling upon land. *Land*, in the sense, in which only it can be used, in order to justify the conclusion, means, that land only which is employed in producing corn; but this is by no means the only species of real property upon which these local charges fall. On the contrary, they fall upon land devoted to permanent pasture; upon land covered with wood, upon land covered with buildings, upon tythe, and upon other descriptions of property, as navigation dues, tolls of various kinds, &c., which are scarcely at all connected with what is ordinarily called land. But it is said, that the land appropriated to the growth of corn bears a larger proportion of these charges than the other species of real property. That this may be the case, in some districts, will not be disputed, but in others it is quite the reverse. Admitting, however (which I do not), that it is in the main true, it by no means follows that the corn growing land is entitled to any special favour. The mere circumstance of the owners of this description of land, being the most extensive proprietors, is no

argument for bestowing upon us any peculiar protection. It is probably the cause of our having obtained it; but may it not have been conceded to our influence rather than to our arguments? Supposing it, however, to be just, that compensation should be made to the landowner, for the exclusive charges which the community has thrown upon him—supposing this proposition to be true in the abstract—concede the justice of the compensation—and, even then, it will not follow that the compensation ought to be made, by raising the prices of corn, and of bread. Yet this is the mode of compensation that has been adopted. If compensation ought in justice to be made, it ought to be made by those classes (if any such there are,) which are improperly relieved from the charges which oppress the landowner. It is notorious, however, that this is not the case. The high price of corn does not fall exclusively upon any peculiarly favoured classes; it falls upon the entire community, and not less upon the landowners and agriculturists than upon the other industrious classes.

First of all, let us examine the case of the labourer in husbandry.

Look at his habits and circumstances—consider how large a portion of his slender income is expended in the purchase of bread and flour—and can any of you arrive at the conclusion that he is benefited by enhancing the price of corn? So far is this from being the case, that, probably, there is hardly a class of labourers more interested in having corn cheap, than those who are engaged in husbandry; because there is none that spends so much, comparatively, upon the necessities, and so little upon the comforts, or the luxuries of life. It is alleged, however that they are interested in keeping up the price of corn; because, if corn were cheaper, there would be less demand for agricultural labour, a portion of the labourers would be thrown out of work, and wages would fall.

That this may be the result in particular cases, will not be denied; but let us consider whether these cases are not exceptions to, rather than examples of, the general rule. As

one of the most obvious effects of a high price of corn, is to force the cultivation of unproductive soils, let us assume, for instance, that, under favour of a price of 10s. a bushel for wheat, a considerable tract of waste land, of inferior quality—say 10,000 acres, is enclosing and bringing into cultivation; that the consequent demand for labour in the neighbourhood exceeds the supply, and that wages rise there from 12s. to 18s. a week;—suppose, now, that wheat falls to 8s. a bushel, that 8s. a bushel will not pay for the improvements, and that their progress is arrested; the demand for labour is suddenly diminished, and wages fall to their previous rate of 12s. a week. In this case, it will not be disputed that the fall in the price of corn, will be hurtful to the labourers in the vicinity; because, with wheat at 10s. a bushel, and wages at 18s. a week, the labourer has a weekly surplus of 11s. 4d. above the price of two thirds of a bushel, which may be considered as about the average consumption of a labourer's family; whereas, with wheat at 8s., and wages at 12s., his

weekly surplus is only 6s. 8d. This case, however, is obviously an exception to the ordinary state of things; it is an example of a forced and occasional demand, in the first instance, for labour, a large portion of which is, after all, not strictly agricultural, and, in the next, of a sudden contraction of that demand. It is a case of the extension of cultivation that frequently occurred during the war, and has thereby become one of the data from which general conclusions have been drawn; but it has no connexion whatever with that gradual and silent improvement of land already in cultivation, which will go on as long as the numbers and enjoyments of the people encrease, however low the price of corn may be, provided the resources of the cultivator are not crippled by the exactions of the Government, or his spirit broken by the demands of the landlord. It is a case that cannot operate permanently in this, if in any country; but, nevertheless, it is the only case in which the agricultural labourer can be benefited by a high price of corn. Other

labourers may be benefited precisely in the same manner, and by the operation of analogous causes. The weaver, or the miner, may be temporarily benefited by a sudden rise in the price of cloth, or of iron, and a consequent rise in the wages of weavers, or of miners;* it would, however, be extremely illogical to affirm that it was permanently advantageous to either of these classes of labourers to raise the price of cloth, or of iron, by measures calculated to restrict the supply of those indispensable articles; and it is equally illogical to affirm, that the ploughman is benefited by a law which raises the price of bread, by causing a scanty supply of corn. In the case of a restricted supply of iron, the ultimate advantage, if any, would accrue to the owners of iron mines, and in that of cloth to those of wool, or of sheep; and so, in the case of corn,

* Whether this rise of price be occasioned by an increased consumption, or by a diminished supply, is, in this view, perfectly immaterial, as, in either case, the wages of the producers will experience a temporary rise.

the owner of land alone can ultimately be benefited; and even he is far less benefited than is commonly supposed.

Now, if it be an error that the farming labourer, considered as a class, is benefited by an artificial enhancement of the price of corn, it is well worth enquiring into the origin of this error; but, in pursuing this enquiry, we must not lose sight of one of the most efficacious principles of the human mind—the association of ideas. The tendency which this principle has to connect in our minds, as cause and effect, ideas, between which there is no essential connexion, inclines me to suspect that the opinion in question may have been generated in the following manner.

During the period which embraces the close of the last, and the commencement of the present century, corn frequently bore a high price, occasioned partly by natural, partly by artificial causes; great enclosures, drainages, and other agricultural improvements, were the consequence. Hence arose, in the extensive

districts where they were progressing, an unusual demand for labour—hence a rise in wages—hence the opinion that the condition of the labourers was permanently and generally prosperous—and hence the supposition that high prices, and the prosperity of the labourers, were inseparably and necessarily connected. A very small share of reflection, however, is requisite to convince us, that though the prosperity of the labourers, (a point by no means established,) and a high price of corn, may have been contemporaneous, the latter was not the cause of the former, except with the aid and through the intervention of concomitant causes, which cannot be again brought into operation. The concurrence of these other causes, must be constantly borne in mind. It must never be forgotten, that, if the labourer did enjoy prosperity at that period, there were many other causes, besides dear corn, that contributed to it; among other, the unceasing demand for men to supply our various military establishments, which may be exemplified

by the fact, that, in the latter years of the war, the price given for substitutes in the militia, in some agricultural counties, varied from £35. to £50. Notwithstanding, however, all these causes, the prosperity of the labourer, even in those days, is a point not yet sufficiently established. Most earnestly, therefore, do I entreat you to investigate the following question dispassionately.

Did the period of the so called agricultural prosperity, which is supposed to have reached its highest pitch in the year 1810, really bring comfort into the cottage of the labourer? Did it give him a greater command over the first necessary of life? Did it enable him to obtain something beyond the necessities of life, and thus, to raise himself in the scale of society? To those landowners who took advantages of the times, and to those tenants whose landlords did not, I know well that it brought wealth; but whether it brought comfort to the labourer, except in districts where enclosures, or other improvements, which cannot be repeated, were in actual progress, is a very

different question.* It is, nevertheless, a question which must be solved, before we can determine whether agricultural prosperity can be truly predicated of that period of our history. Summon, therefore, into your presence, the men who are old enough to remember those times, and who are both able and willing to give you an account of their then condition. Let these enquiries be made in various situations. Make them in districts of old enclosure—make them in districts of open field—make them in the North, and in the middle, and in the South of England, excluding only those particular spots where such improvements were in actual progress, as, when once finished, cannot be repeated. If your enquiries are so conducted, I am much mistaken, if you will not find that the boasted

* The drainage and allotment of the fens in Lincolnshire, the enclosure of the wolds in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and of the downs in Sussex and Wiltshire, are operations that have ceased, never to return. There can be no repetition of these extraordinary sources of demand for a species of labour usually (though not with very strict propriety) termed agricultural.

period of agricultural prosperity was, to the labourer, a season of distress—and the one, during which he began to fall from his former station to that lower condition, to which we now see him reduced in many parts of England.

I am well aware, that this opinion is at variance with those that are promulgated by some of the advocates of a high price of corn. You must, therefore, bear with me a little, while I entreat you to make some comparisons between wages and prices, for which I must refer you, not to traditional, but to documentary evidence.

During the ten years that elapsed from the year 1805, to the year 1814, both inclusive, the lowest yearly average of wheat was 5s. 2d. a bushel, (in 1807;) the highest was 15s. 8d. (in 1812;) the mean price is 12s. 5d.; while the average of the whole period is 11s. 6d. Now it appears, from accounts kept in different and remote districts, which I have had an opportunity of examining, that

in one* of them, which is partly a manufacturing country, the highest wages given to agricultural labourers, during the abovementioned period, was 15s. a week, (in 1813,) and the lowest 11s. a week. From 1814, to 1824, they were generally 13s. or 14s., and occasionally 15s., never falling below 13s. Since 1824, they have been at 14s. and 15s. In another district† (purely agricultural) the wages of farming labourers, from 1809, to 1815, were 12s. a week, and those of women, 5s.; in 1830, they were 12s., and those of women, 4s. 6d. In a third,‡ purely agricultural district, the highest wages given in the month of May, since the commencement of the war in 1803, were 14s. a week (in 1812, 1813, and 1814,) and the lowest 9s. (in 1823.) The highest average price of wheat, in the same period, was in 1812; the lowest in 1822.

* The most southern part of the West Riding of Yorkshire.

† Cleveland, in the remotest part of the North Riding of Yorkshire.

‡ In Northamptonshire.

Let us now make some comparison between these wages and prices. The weekly consumption of wheat in a labourer's family, consisting of himself, his wife, and three children, may be stated at about two-thirds of a bushel, the amount of their enjoyments will, therefore, depend, *ceteris paribus*, upon the excess of the weekly wages, above the price of two-thirds of a bushel of wheat. Now, that excess was the greatest in 1814, viz. 7s. 11d.; and the least in 1810, 1s. 2d. It will, however, be safer to draw our conclusions from periods of a moderate length, than from single years. Five years are, probably, as fair a period as can be chosen, and the year 1810, (as the point of the highest alleged agricultural prosperity,) will not improperly be taken as the centre year of one of these periods. Comparing then the wages, as stated in the annexed Tables, (in which the wages are those given in Northamptonshire, and the prices those for all England,) with the price of two-thirds of a bushel of wheat, it appears, that in the first period of five years, ending with

1807, the average excess of the weekly wages, above the price of two-thirds of a bushel of wheat, amounted to 4s. 1d.; in the second period, ending with 1812, it was 2s. 10d.; in the third, ending with 1817, it was 5s. 8d.; in the fourth, ending with 1822, it was 5s. 10d.; and in the last, ending with 1827, it was 5s. 4d. It necessarily follows from this statement, that the period, which is uniformly cited as that of the greatest agricultural prosperity, was precisely that in which the surplus* income of the labourer was the smallest, and, consequently, that, in which the comforts of the agricultural population were the most abridged. Nor is this conclusion derived from any peculiar mode of presenting the data from which it is drawn; for the result will be the same, whether we contemplate single years, or cycles of five years; and whether those cycles are distinct, each from the preceding one, or only varying by the addition to, and exclusion from, each cycle, of a single year. In whatever

* The same inference is deducible from accounts which I have seen of the wages given during the same period, in the south western parts of Surrey.

way we view the case, it follows, that, with the exception of the famine of 1801, the year of 1810 must have been the most unfavourable to the labourer in husbandry that has occurred since the close of the last century.

Having considered the effects of high price upon the great mass of the agricultural population, consisting of labourers, let me now call your attention to the situation in which your tenantry, the owners of farming stock, have been placed by, or, at least, notwithstanding the successive Corn Bills which have passed since the peace. The object of the law of 1815, was to keep the average price of wheat at, or as near as possible to 80s. a quarter, below which it was stated by the witnesses, and admitted by the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1814, that wheat (supposing the existing rents to be continued) could not be produced in England. To this Bill I gave my assent; and of all the important questions upon which I voted, in the course of the twenty-five years, during which, with one short interval, I have sat in Parliament, it is

the only one upon which I regret the part that I took. I am, and have been for many years satisfied, that that measure was founded upon the most erroneous principles, and that it has been attended by the most disastrous consequences. In this place allow me to draw your attention solely to the effects which it produced upon your tenants. Relying upon the wisdom, and upon the power of the Legislature, they were induced by it to expect those prices for their produce, which the law, and the proceedings which led to its enactment, held out as the prices of grain to be maintained in this country. They entered upon, and continued upon farms, the rents of which were founded upon the prices held out to them by an Act of Parliament. If prices rose to an extravagant height, as they did in 1817, in consequence of the deficient harvest of 1816, the expectations of the farmers and land valuers were raised still higher; while, on the other hand, if they fell below the Parliamentary standard, the fall was attributed to some accidental and tran-

sient cause, and was disregarded in fixing rents, both by the landlord, the valuer, and the tenant.

During the interval, from 1815 to 1822, the farmer experienced the most extraordinary fluctuations in the price of his merchandize, fluctuations arising from the variations of the seasons, but aggravated by the state of the law, which either rigorously prohibited, or indiscriminately admitted foreign corn.* What, however, I am particularly anxious to direct your attention to, is the utter inefficiency of the law to accomplish either of its two purposes, of protecting the farmer from too low, and the consumer from too high a price. In the Spring of 1817, wheat sold at 120s. a quarter; in the Winter of 1821—2, it sold at less than 40s. a quarter; the average of the year 1817 being 94s., and that of 1822 being 43s. The highest price in Oxford, at Lady-day, 1817, was 148s.; at Michaelmas, 1820, 66s.; at Michaelmas,

* I purposely omit all reference to the Currency Question; not because I disregard its effects, but because it does not apply *exclusively*, or even *peculiarly*, to corn.

1822, 52s. a quarter. The consequence of this state of things cannot have escaped your recollection. Great difficulties had been felt by the agricultural interest in 1814, 15, and 16; but the difficulties of all former years were surpassed by the distress of the Winter of 1821—2. The insolvency of tenants, at this period, was unparalleled in the history of the agricultural classes, and the inefficacy of the Act of 1815 was so universally acknowledged, that an alteration in the law was made in the Session of 1822; but the alteration being contingent upon circumstances which never occurred, no permanent practical change took place till the year 1828, when the present system was adopted. During the period, therefore, from 1815 to 1828, the prohibitory system of 1815 was in virtual operation. How far it secured you from a diminution of rental, your tenants from insolvency, and your estates from injury, every landowner in England can testify. I am here, however, principally entreating your consideration of the effects produced upon the agricultural capital of the country. Year after year,

the value of the farmer's produce had been diminishing, till it fell to little more than half the price at which Parliament considered that he could be remunerated for his industry. Year after year, he was deluded by fallacious hopes, excited by the law itself; his rent was paid out of his capital, instead of out of his profits, till that capital became insufficient for the proper cultivation of the land, and then you yourselves began to feel the calamity, by which many of your tenantry had been already overwhelmed.* Compare, then, the situation of that tenantry, under the protection of the Corn Law of 1815, with what it probably would have been, had the trade been avowedly free; or if you had been contented with the protection afforded by the law of 1804, under which it would have been practically free. Prices would, indeed, have

* It cannot be alleged, that these disasters, in which landlords and tenants participated, were occasioned by the want of adequate protection; for, during the whole of this period, their interests were protected by that very law, which, at the time of its enactment, was considered sufficient for its purpose by those who went great lengths in favour of the protecting system.

lowered, but no such extravagant hopes would have been excited, no such erroneous calculations would have been made; rents would have fallen to a level corresponding with the price of grain, the agricultural capital of the country would have been unimpaired, and the land would have remained in a better state of cultivation. Your nominal rentals might have been diminished, but your rents would have been collected with facility, and you would not have been driven, time after time, to the wretched expedient of returning a per centage to your tenants at each successive audit, in order to induce them to remain on their farms,—an expedient, which proclaims to your fellow citizens, that those who resort to it, are in the habit of demanding from their tenants a larger rent than they are capable of paying. Nothing, I must confess, is more distressing to me, than to witness these half-yearly annunciations of this mis-called liberality of certain portions of the landed interest. Has it never struck you, fellow citizens, that this proceeding is no evidence of liberality, but rather of extortion; that

the return of part of the rent may be proper, when called for by temporary calamity, by the effects of flood, or storm, or by some accidental misfortune overwhelming a particular tenant, or class of tenants; but that, when resorted to habitually, it is not to be justified; that it convicts those who have recourse to it of continued attempts to extract from their tenantry a rent not warranted by the value of agricultural produce; and that, so far from proving the liberality of the landlord, it affords testimony of a very different quality.

By some, however, I am told, that the charges upon the landowners are heavy; that their estates are loaded with mortgages and family settlements; that they are called upon to maintain a certain state in the country; that, for these purposes, their rents must be kept up; and that, to keep up rents, corn must be dear. I hope that these difficulties of the landowner are exaggerated by imprudent advocates of the Corn Laws; for, depend upon it, no impartial judge can ever think that such arguments justify the imposition of a heavy tax

upon the community. That the Corn Laws are a heavy tax, no man can doubt, nor that you yourselves pay a large portion of it. Do not flatter yourselves that you escape from this impost. Consider what are the habits of the landed gentry, from the smallest to the most extensive proprietors, who reside upon their estates, and derive their incomes from the rent of lands occupied by others. Let each individual among you enter seriously upon this enquiry. Examine your respective expenditures in the gross, analyse them in detail, and you will find that the price of corn affects their amount most materially. The wages of your day labourers, whether employed upon the farm, or in the garden—the wages of your menial servants—the feeding of your dogs—of your horses—your travelling expenses—the repairs of your buildings, whether for use or recreation—the amount of all these, and other sources of expense, which form the great bulk of your annual outlay, whether upon a large or upon a small scale; is materially affected by the price of provisions. As far, therefore, as you, and

those in your employ, are, either directly, or indirectly, consumers of agricultural produce, you suffer together with the rest of the community—you partake of the injury you inflict upon your fellow citizens—you are fellow sufferers with them. I am far, however, from contending, that you derive no advantage from extra prices, and their consequence, extra rents—you do derive an advantage, and an unjust advantage from them. Its value, however, is not to be measured by the extra rent which you receive—it is only a portion of the extra rent that goes into your pockets, for, while the extra rent is augmenting your receipts, the extra prices are augmenting your expenditure. The other classes of the community have no set off against the injury inflicted upon them by high prices ; to them the loss is unaccompanied by the slightest compensation, so that the result of the modern Corn Laws is to confer only the fraction of a benefit upon one, and *that*, the wealthiest class of the nation, and to do unmixed evil to every other class.

It is in this last point of view that I shall

now proceed to consider them ; for, injurious as their enactments have proved to, the three branches of society connected with the land, the mischievous influences which they exercise upon the manufacturing and commercial interests of the country, are infinitely more varied and extensive. I shall here consider only their effect upon the cost of producing manufactured goods. It is very much the fashion of the present day, to dwell upon the important functions which machinery performs in the manufactories of this country ; and, hence, an inference is drawn by some persons, that the price of manual labour is of trifling consequence to our successful competition with the foreigner. These reasoners must imagine, that the dense population which has grown up in the manufacturing districts, has, comparatively, little to do with the manufacture, and that the great sums which that population receives in the shape of wages, form no component part of the price of the manufactured article. They cannot be aware of the vast momentum of manual labour that is required,

even for those branches of manufacture in which the efficiency of machinery is the most remarkable ; still less can they be aware, that, in some very important branches, machinery is scarcely at all employed. In the processes of spinning and weaving, mechanical power has indeed been applied to a great extent ; but the idea, that human labour has been superseded by machinery, is one of the most chimerical fancies that ever entered into the mind of man. The result of this application of artificial power has rather been to augment the quantity, and reduce the price of manufactured goods, than to dispense with the agency of man in their preparation ; hence the comforts and enjoyments of all ranks have been promoted, and the agricultural labourer himself has been enabled to obtain articles, which nothing but the application of mechanical power could have brought, within his reach. In other and very important manufactures, however, the use of machinery is extremely limited ; and, upon these, the effect of an enhanced price of the first necessary of

life is the most apparent, though, perhaps, it is not, in reality, more injurious to them, than to those branches of industry which seem to be withdrawn from its influence by the more extensive employment of machinery, but in which a large part of the expenditure may be ultimately resolved into the wages of labour.

In order to place this view of the necessary effects of the Corn Laws more distinctly before you, may I be allowed to exhibit some details of the expenses of labour, in a few of our leading manufactures?

It is a subject to which your habits rarely attract your thoughts; few of you have local opportunities for considering it; and I am afraid that I have remarked in some a reluctance to enquire into the state of your manufacturing and commercial countrymen.

In the manufacture of fine woollen cloth, the wages paid by the manufacturer amount to about 60 per cent. upon the total expenditure incurred between the purchase of the wool in the foreign port, and the period when the cloth is in a state fit for sale; in the ma-

nufacture of linen yarn, the corresponding expenditure in wages is about 48 per cent.

In the manufacture of earthenware, the wages paid by the manufacturer amount to about 40 per cent.; that is to say, in the conversion of the requisite quantity of clay into goods worth £100., £40. are paid to the workmen in the shape of wages.

It is obvious, however, that, in these three instances, especially in the latter, a very large proportion of the remaining charges is resolvable into the wages of labour, though, perhaps, not to so great an extent as in the next instances I am about to cite. In the manufacture of pig iron, the expense of labour upon the various ingredients employed, amounts to no less than 81 per cent.; and, in its subsequent conversion into bar iron, to 84 per cent.*

In the working of collieries, the expenses are almost entirely resolvable into labour; and, in cases within my own knowledge, the wages actually paid, exceed 90 per cent. upon the

* 165 upon 200.

current expenditure. In the different branches of the steel manufacture, the following may be stated as the proportions per cent. which materials and wages bear to each other.

In Files (coarse) ..	<i>Material</i> 50	<i>Wages</i> 50 per cent.
Ditto (finer)	25	.. 75
Table Knives & Forks ..	35	.. 65
Razors	10	.. 90
Scissors (coarse)	15	.. 85
Ditto (fine)	4	.. 96

Great as is the proportion which wages bear to the direct cost of manufacturing these articles, it must never be forgotten, that by far the greater part of the price of the material itself consists of wages; and, consequently, that almost the entire value of our steel goods may be said to consist of the wages of labour.

These are only a few specimens, selected not for their peculiar applicability to my argument, but because I can speak of them, either from my own knowledge, or from information derived immediately from those who are engaged in these branches of industry.

With these examples before our eyes, surely it is impossible to imagine that the employment of machinery renders it a matter of indifference to our manufacturing capitalists, whether the food of the operative classes is dear or cheap. Even where machinery has been carried to the greatest extent, the wages of labour constitute a most important element in the price of manufactured goods; and high wages, when they are the result of dear provisions, not of a growing demand for labour, must ultimately tell upon commercial prosperity. Dear provisions must, indeed, produce one of the following effects—they must either lower the condition of the labourer, or raise the rate of wages. Nobody can wish the former result; you must, therefore, wish high wages to be the result of dear corn—but if wages are high, the price of goods must be high—but if the price of goods be high, our manufacturers cannot compete with foreigners—but if they cannot compete with foreigners, our export trade is diminished—if our export trade is diminished, the prosperity of our manufacturing population is undermined

—if their prosperity is undermined, they will consume fewer provisions; the demand for agricultural produce, in the manufacturing counties, will be restricted—the surplus produce will remain in the hands of the farmer, and the ultimate result will be a fall of rents, occasioned, be it remembered, by an attempt to raise them. Let this sink deep into your minds.

Of the importance of the demand for corn in the manufacturing districts, and of the effect which it produces upon the welfare of the agricultural tracts, it has often appeared to me that many of you are not sufficiently aware. Your habits do not lead you to trace the winding course of commerce. In some of you, the opinions of olden times are not yet extinguished; the prejudice is still fostered, that attention to such subjects is inconsistent with the station of a landed gentleman; among others prevails a distaste to commerce and manufactures, and, transitively, to those who are engaged in them. Some of you dislike the smoke and bustle of commercial towns; and what is originally only a matter of taste, affects ulti-

mately your modes of feeling and thinking upon these subjects; some again fancy, that the rise of the manufacturing and commercial classes has had, and will have a tendency to interfere with, and encroach upon your pleasures and recreations, while others, more seriously, and still more mistakenly, imagine that the dense population which is engendered by thriving trade, is inconsistent with that order in the government and content in the people, which, according to them, are the peculiar characteristics of an agricultural or pastoral population. Whether this last opinion still maintains its ground, I know not; but I know that it is one that has been entertained and promulgated in very high quarters among you; and I am quite certain that this, and other opinions and feelings, operate strongly towards diverting your attention from the interest that we have, as a body, in the activity of every workshop and counting-house in Birmingham and Liverpool. Shall I, therefore, be taking too great a liberty in stating one or two facts, relative to the course of some parts of the internal com-

trade, which may serve to display, in the clearest light, the interest that the owners of landed property have in augmenting the numbers and the comforts of their manufacturing fellow subjects. I confine myself to facts within my own observation.

The clothing districts of the West Riding of Yorkshire export their manufactures by the rivers Aire and Calder, and, while that navigation transmits the produce of their industry to other parts of Great Britain, and to foreign countries, it furnishes their inhabitants with corn imported from the East Riding and the Northern parts of Lincolnshire. The annual average quantity of corn which thus ascends the Aire and Calder, for the supply of the clothing districts, amounts to 842,000 quarters, whilst 100,000 quarters are sent up the river Dun for the consumption of Sheffield and its populous neighbourhood. These 942,000 quarters, about half of which is estimated to consist of wheat, cannot be produced by the cultivation of much less than the same number of acres, a surface equal in extent to the county of Sussex.

Now, to put an extreme case; suppose some convulsion of nature were to annihilate Leeds and Sheffield, with their appendant towns and villages, it is obvious, that the 942,000 acres, appropriated to their maintenance, must be thrown out of cultivation. Consequent upon the abandonment of these lands, would be the diminution of the rent of the contiguous lands, then of lands somewhat more remote, and, ultimately, of land generally. But, if such would be the result of the *destruction* of this market for agricultural produce, it follows, that measures, which tend to restrict it, either by diminishing the number, or by abridging the comforts of the people, have a corresponding tendency to diminish the demand for agricultural produce, and, ultimately, to injure the proprietors of land. That some temporary advantage may accrue to the landowner from an artificial enhancement of the price of corn, I am far from denying; though, for reasons already stated, I believe, that even this advantage is much less than is generally imagined; but that his solid and permanent

prosperity must depend upon the ease, comfort, and prosperity of the industrious classes of the community, is a proposition, which, it appears to me, that no man can doubt, who has taken even a cursory view of the progress of this nation. Compare the advances of agriculture in England, during the earlier part of the eighteenth century, when it was fostered by the bounty on the export of corn, with those which it made in the succeeding period, when the bounty had virtually ceased, and when the corn trade was practically free; and the result will proclaim the vast superiority of the encouragement afforded by a thriving commerce, and an encresing population, over that which can be afforded by legislative protection of the least objectionable kind. But let me entreat you to carry the comparison a step further. Compare the methods by which our ancestors encouraged tillage, with those adopted by the present generation; they, indeed, gave a bounty on the export of corn, and thereby attracted to agriculture capital, which, without that attraction, would have

been otherwise employed; but they did not enhance the price of corn; they did not, by enhancing the price of corn, retard the progress of manufacturing industry; on the contrary, they made corn cheaper*—they made it abundant—they produced an artificial abundance; your device has been to create an artificial scarcity; but I, fear I have used an expression, which may savour somewhat of harshness. I assure you, I have no wish to do so; but the misfortune of the question is, that, in whatever way you deal with it, the system resolves itself into one for creating an artificial scarcity. Your object is to maintain agriculture; your mode of maintaining agriculture is to raise the price of corn; your mode of raising the price is to restrict the supply of corn; you contrive, or endeavour to contrive that there shall be in the market

* Some apology is due for advancing an opinion adverse to that of Adam Smith; but, as an argument on the question would be misplaced here, I must confine myself to the expression of my regret, as being obliged to dissent, in this particular, from that great authority.

somewhat less corn than there would be if the trade was free. You have no wish for a famine—nobody can imagine it; your characters, your dispositions, forbid it—but you *do* wish, (or, if you do not, you act as if you did,) that the supply of corn, in this country, should be just so much (not more) below what may be termed the natural supply, as may cause the price to rise above the natural price. The object of thus raising the price of corn, is to raise the rent and price of land. In this rise of the letting and selling price of land you have an interest, but you exaggerate this interest greatly. The excess of the artificial rent, thus produced above the natural rent, is not all clear gain to you. The artificial excess, in the price of bread, is a clear loss to others; but the artificial excess, in the rent and price of land, is not a clear gain to you.

Consider, therefore, I beseech you, whether the course you are pursuing upon this important question, either conduces to your welfare, or redounds to your honour.

I do not propose to you, to investigate at

present the anti-commercial character of the Corn Laws, their effect upon the expences of the Government, or their connexion with many evils which oppress the country. Curious and instructive as are the views that may be taken of them in these lights, any details, upon these branches of the question, would lead me further than I have any disposition to proceed upon this occasion. Passing them over, therefore, for the present, let me entreat you to reflect more seriously, than you appear to me to have done heretofore, upon the effects which a high price of corn produces upon the population at large, and upon the operations of our industrious capitalists. Recollect, that it must either abridge the comforts of the former, or frustrate the exertions of the latter. Consider, whether your own welfare is promoted by it. Look back calmly upon the last seventeen years; take a deliberate survey of the varying fortunes of the agricultural classes during that period. Apply yourselves to the subject dispassionately. Assume, that the Corn Laws had effected their purpose with the most complete success; that

is to say, that they had prevented wheat from ever falling below 80s. a quarter; and then calculate what must have been the effect of such a state of things upon every class of society, upon every interest, upon every section of the community. If you can but persuade yourselves, to sift carefully the arguments on either side; if you can but divest yourselves of the desire to discover truth in one direction rather than in another; if, in short, you will but review the question with impartiality, I feel the most perfect confidence that you will very soon begin to entertain doubts upon it; and when doubts have been once awakened, I am satisfied that the same process, which changed my own opinions, will change yours. Months, or perhaps years, may elapse, before these operations can be effected; but the force of truth is too great to be resisted long; and as I am sure that the great majority of you have no wish to resist her, I feel equally satisfied that wherever truth is to be found, you will, in the long run, be found also.

These pages are addressed to you by one who

has no interest but in common with you ; all his temporal welfare is bound up with yours ; whatever is for your advantage, must conduce to his, and to that of those who are the most dear to him. He would not have presumed to trespass upon your indulgence, if he had not been deeply impressed with the interest which the millions of his countrymen have in the question, and if he had not felt it a duty to endeavour to excite your attention to it. The most anxious wish that he entertains upon public affairs is, that your attention may be so excited, as to induce you to consent to the abolition of a system, which condemns you, and your countrymen, to a qualified scarcity of the first necessary of life.

I have the honour to be,

Fellow Countrymen,

Your most faithful friend and servant,

MILTON.

Milton, February, 1821.

TABLE A.

*Shewing the Wages in May, and the difference between
Wages and the price of two-thirds of a Bushel of Wheat.*

Year.	Wages.	Price of two-thirds of a bushel.	Difference be- tween wages and price.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
1797	7 0	4 4	2 8
1798	7 0	4 2	2 10
1799	7 0	5 9	1 3
1800	7 0	9 5	2 5
1801	10 0	9 10	0 3
1802	9 0	5 7	3 5
1803	10 0	4 8	5 4
1804	10 0	5 0	5 0
1805	10 0	7 3	2 9
1806	10 0	6 7	3 5
1807	10 0	6 0	4 0
1808	10 0	6 6	3 6
1809	10 0	8 0	2 0
1810	10 0	8 10	1 2
1811	12 0	7 10	4 2
1812	14 0	10 6	3 6
1813	14 0	9 1	4 11

Year.	Wages.	Price of two-thirds of a bushel.	Difference be- tween wages and price.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
1814	14 0	6 1	7 11
1815	12 0	5 4	6 8
1816	11 0	6 3	4 9
1817	12 0	7 9	4 3
1818	12 0	7 0	5 0
1819	12 0	6 1	5 11
1820	12 0	5 6	6 6
1821	10 0	4 6	5 6
1822	10 0	3 8	6 4
1823	9 0	4 5½	4 6½
1824	10 0	5 4	4 8
1825	11 0	5 8	5 4
1826	11 0	4 10	6 2
1827	11 0	4 8	6 4
1828	11 0	5 0	6 0
1829	11 0	5 6	5 6

TABLE B.

Shewing the excess of the Weekly Wages in May, over the price of two-thirds of a Bushel of Wheat, upon an average of five years, one year being respectively added to, and subtracted from each preceding cycle of five years.

Cycle ending	Excess of Wages.	Cycle ending	Excess of Wages.
In 1801	s. d. 0 11	In 1816	s. d. 5 6,00
1802	1 0,80	1817	5 8,20
~~1803~~	~~1 0,80~~	~~1818~~	~~5 8,60~~
1804	2 3,80	1819	5 3,80
1805	3 4,20	1820	5 3,40
1806	3 11,80	1821	5 5,20
1807	4 1,20	1822	5 10,20
1808	3 8,80	1823	5 9,15
1809	3 1,60	1824	5 6,15
1810	2 9,80	1825	5 3,15
1811	2 11,60	1826	5 4,95
1812	2 10,40	1827	5 4,95
1813	3 1,80	1828	5 8,40
1814	4 4	1829	5 10,40
1815	5 5,20		

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